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Report to Congressional Requesters

September 2026

# FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

## The Judiciary Should Measure the Utilization of Its Administrative Space

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Informing Democracy Through Oversight

GAO-26-108603

GAO Highlights

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

# The Judiciary Should Measure the Utilization of Its Administrative Space

GAO-26-108603 September 2026

A report to congressional requesters

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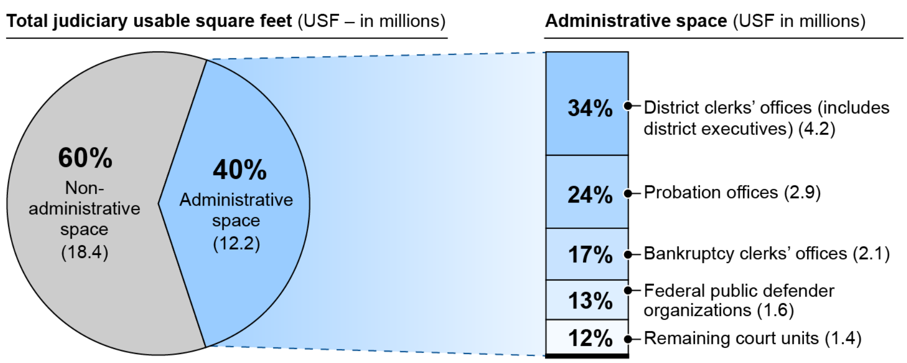
## What GAO Found

The federal judiciary's administrative space, such as the district clerks' and probation offices that support the judiciary's mission, made up 40 percent of the judiciary's total space in fiscal years 2021 through 2025. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's administrative space totaled 12.2 million usable square feet across 716 of the 772 facilities the judiciary occupied nationwide, a decrease of 1 percent from fiscal year 2021. GAO found that administrative space was the sole type of space in over a third of judiciary occupied facilities in fiscal year 2025. Most of these facilities (234 of 272) were commercially owned. Ninety-six percent of the 234 commercially owned facilities were occupied by federal public defender organizations and probation offices. The proportion of the judiciary's annual rent payments spent on administrative space, in both nominal and inflation adjusted dollars, remained steady—between 39 and 40 percent from fiscal year 2021 through fiscal year 2025.

**The Federal Judiciary's Fiscal Year 2025 Administrative Space Distribution, in Usable Square Feet**




Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The remaining court units include the courts of appeals clerks' offices (including bankruptcy appellate panels); courts of appeals central legal staff; circuit executives', bankruptcy administrators', and pretrial services offices; and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. For more details, see fig. 2 in GAO-26-108603.

While the judiciary has data on the amount of administrative space it occupies and the associated rent costs, it does not collect or review occupancy data. Without occupancy data, the judiciary is unable to measure the extent to which its administrative space is utilized, as utilization is the ratio of the average daily occupancy of a space compared to the usable square feet of the space. Judiciary policies and guidance identify the importance of maximizing the use of its space and taking a data-based approach when doing so. For example, part of the judiciary's Asset Management Planning process includes a physical assessment of how well court units' space functions and meets the judiciary's space standards. But, according to judiciary officials, measuring utilization is not part of the judiciary's practices because it has not identified a business need to do so. Measuring the utilization of its administrative space and identifying utilization benchmarks would enhance the judiciary's decision-making, bolster its efforts to meet its stated goals to efficiently manage and maximize the use of its space, and help ensure it is not wasting resources by leasing more space than it needs.

## Why GAO Did This Study

Chronic underutilization of federal buildings is one of the main reasons that federal real property management has been on GAO's High Risk List for more than 20 years. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary paid over $1 billion in rent, making rent one of its largest expenses.

GAO was asked to examine the judiciary's utilization of its administrative space. This report (1) describes the characteristics of the judiciary's administrative space and how it has changed from fiscal years 2021 through 2025 and (2) assesses the extent to which the judiciary is measuring the utilization of its administrative space.

GAO selected a nongeneralizable sample of nine judiciary facilities and interviewed officials about the utilization of their administrative space. GAO observed the use of administrative space at four of these facilities. GAO surveyed the 13 judiciary circuit executives who represent all court units nationwide about using occupancy data to measure utilization. GAO also reviewed and analyzed judiciary data and documents and interviewed officials from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOUSC) and General Services Administration.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Director of the AOUSC establish procedures for the judiciary to collect occupancy data and calculate the utilization of its administrative space at an established, regular interval. Such procedures should include the development of benchmarks and be incorporated into the judiciary's space use decision-making process. The AOUSC stated it would carefully consider the report's findings and recommendations. Implementing GAO's recommendation would help the judiciary better maximize its use of space.

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**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| AOUSC | Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts |
| CFO Act | Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 |
| GSA | General Services Administration |
| HVAC | heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning |
| IT | information technology |
| USE IT Act | Utilizing Space Efficiently and Improving Technologies Act |

U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE
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September 24, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate

The Honorable Joni K. Ernst
United States Senate

Chronic underutilization of federal buildings is one of the main reasons that federal real property management has been on GAO's High Risk List for more than 20 years.[1] In 2023, we found that agencies in the executive branch did not have a standard way of measuring office space utilization and recommended that the Office of Management and Budget lead the development and use of benchmarks for measuring building utilization.[2] In 2025, the Utilizing Space Efficiently and Improving Technologies (USE IT) Act required certain agencies in the executive branch to collect and report occupancy data that are to be used to calculate and report building utilization rates.[3]

Like executive branch agencies, the federal judiciary spends a substantial amount on real property each year. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary paid over $1 billion in rent to the General Services Administration (GSA), making rent one of the judiciary's largest expenses. While most of the judiciary's real property is made up of courtrooms and judges' chambers, it also includes administrative space, such as the offices and team rooms

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[1]GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, GAO-25-107743 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

[2]See GAO, *Federal Real Property: Agencies Need New Benchmarks to Measure and Shed Underutilized Space*, GAO-24-107006 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 26, 2023).

[3]In March 2026, GSA publicly reported a summary of some of this data on GSA.gov. The USE IT Act, enacted in January 2025, mandated that departments covered by the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990 measure and report on their building occupancy and utilization rates. Pub. L. No. 118-272, div. B, tit. III, § 2302, 138 Stat. 2992, 3218 (2025). The CFO Act established chief financial officers to oversee financial management activities at 23 agencies. Pub. L. No. 101-576, § 205, 104 Stat. 2838, 2842-43. The list now includes 24 agencies. See 31 U.S.C. § 901(b). These agencies are often referred to collectively as the CFO Act agencies. The USE IT Act does not apply to the judicial branch.

used to support the judiciary's mission. These spaces are similar to executive branch office space.

You asked us to examine the judiciary's utilization of its administrative space. This report:

1. describes the characteristics of the judiciary's administrative space and how the space's square footage and rent have changed from fiscal years 2021 through 2025, and

2. assesses the extent to which the judiciary is measuring the utilization of its administrative space.

To address these objectives, we defined administrative space as all space assigned to the courts of appeals clerks' and central legal staff offices, circuit executives' offices, district clerks' offices, bankruptcy clerks' offices, bankruptcy administrators' offices, probation offices, pretrial services offices, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOUSC) within GSA managed buildings, and federal public defender organizations.[4] We refer to these collectively as court units and federal public defender organizations.[5] These spaces accommodate a wide variety of judiciary functions, such as: employee workstations, such as cubicles and offices; conference rooms; public reception areas; training rooms; storage rooms; server and telecommunications rooms; interview rooms; break rooms; fitness centers; and lab facilities. We did not include space assigned to courtrooms, libraries, grand jury suites, specialty

[4]Our definition includes the entire space assigned to these court units and federal public defender organizations in buildings leased through GSA. GSA uses agency bureau codes assigned to federal agencies to track federal space. According to judiciary officials, for the judiciary, agency bureau codes are typically assigned at the court unit level, which refers to the most granular element in the judiciary's organizational structure. We identified the agency bureau codes assigned to the judiciary that most closely align with office space for our definition of administrative space. Because the data are aggregated at the agency bureau code level, we were not able to consider space smaller than that assigned to an agency bureau code.

[5]For the purposes of this review, we consider the AOUSC to be a court unit.

courts, juror parking, or judges' chambers in our definition.[6] While judiciary officials told us that the judiciary does not have a business purpose for classifying space as administrative, they largely agreed with our definition for the purposes of this review.[7]

In alignment with our 2023 review of executive branch agencies, for the purposes of this review, we defined measuring utilization as calculating the ratio of the occupancy of a space compared to the space's capacity based on usable square feet.[8] We considered occupancy to be the average number of employees recorded as physically present in a space

[6]Specifically, we did not include space assigned to the following agency bureau codes: courtrooms and chambers for court of appeals, district, magistrate, and bankruptcy judges; the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Court; the Court of Federal Claims; the Court of International Trade; the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit; and circuit libraries, grand jury suites, and juror parking. While judges' chamber suites typically contain a judge's private chambers or office in addition to a reference or conference room; offices; and other spaces used by the judge's support staff, such as law clerks and judicial assistants, we did not include them in our definition of administrative space because the agency bureau code for chambers space is combined with courtrooms. As a result, we were unable to disaggregate the chamber suite usable square footage and rent costs from courtroom usable square footage and rent costs.

[7]AOUSC officials developed and shared a preliminary definition of administrative space for the purposes of this review that largely identified the same court units in our definition. However, AOUSC officials noted that they did not consider all space within these court units to be administrative. Specifically, there are spaces within these court units that they consider to be court-unique and non-administrative space, including some areas they consider to not be occupiable or have typical office functions, such as public reception and intake areas; archival, secured records, and inactive records storage; evidence and financial vaults; urinalysis labs; and secured IT server rooms. Further, the AOUSC's preliminary definition did not include, as our definition does, space assigned to the courts of appeals central legal staff, federal public defender organizations, and the AOUSC's space within GSA buildings. Nonetheless, AOUSC officials told us they did not object to these additions and understood why we included all space assigned to these court units and federal public defender organizations in our definition, given the data are aggregated at the agency bureau code level.

[8]See GAO-24-107006; *Federal Real Property: Preliminary Results Show that Increased Telework and Longstanding Challenges Led to Underutilized Federal Buildings,* GAO-23-107060 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2023); and *Federal Real Property: Preliminary Results Show Federal Buildings Remain Underutilized Due to Longstanding Challenges and Increased Telework,* GAO-23-106200 (Washington, D.C.: July 13, 2023). This largely aligns with the USE IT Act. The USE IT Act includes two utilization numbers: (1) the actual utilization rate is a space's total usable square feet divided by its occupancy, and (2) the building utilization is a percentage of utilization calculated by comparing the actual utilization rate with the capacity based on the utilization benchmark of 150 usable square feet per person. Usable square feet—used by the judiciary to set and measure progress toward national space reduction goals—include the portion of a building that is available for occupants (e.g., offices, team rooms, and conference rooms) but might not include building infrastructure spaces such as mechanical rooms, building common areas, and some building circulation areas such as public hallways and public toilets.

on a daily basis.[9] Utilization differs from occupancy because a space's capacity is based on its usable square footage, not the number of people assigned to it. All assigned employees could use a space every day, and the space could still be underutilized if it has more usable square feet than needed.

To describe the characteristics of the judiciary's administrative space, we analyzed nationwide judiciary data.[10] More specifically, to identify the amount of administrative and total space the judiciary occupied and the associated rent costs from fiscal years 2021 through 2025, we used unique occupancy agreement numbers assigned to each court unit and federal public defender organization to identify the usable square footage and rent costs.[11] We also used these data to identify other characteristics of the space the judiciary occupies, such as facility age and ownership. To assess the reliability of these data, we reviewed relevant documentation, sent the judiciary questions, and interviewed judiciary officials responsible for the data. Based on our discussions with judiciary officials, responses to our data reliability questions, and where possible,

[9]By comparison, the USE IT Act defines the term "occupancy" to mean the average number of employees actually performing duties in person in a public building or federally leased space at least 40 hours per week over a 2-month period.

[10]We analyzed data from the judiciary's internal space system, JSPACE, which integrates rent bills and space assignments from several GSA data feeds and internal judiciary data sources. For the purposes of this review, we refer to this as judiciary data. Such data reflect space leased through GSA and rent billed to the AOUSC. They do not include information on facilities not managed by GSA, including: two buildings owned by the Architect of the Capitol, the U.S. Supreme Court Building and the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building; two courthouses owned by the National Park Service; and the majority of community defender organizations' facilities (four community defender organizations have trial preparation suites in GSA-managed courthouses). The data also do not include facilities where the judiciary infrequently borrows space from public or private entities, such as state and county courthouses, or the AOUSC's space in the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center operated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Lastly, the data do not include the U.S. Court of International Trade and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit as they are not billed to the AOUSC.

[11]Specifically, we calculated the usable square footage for each fiscal year by summing the average monthly usable square footage for each occupancy agreement. We used the average because occupancy agreements can change during a fiscal year, resulting in increases and decreases in the usable square footage. An occupancy agreement is a formal, signed agreement governing relations between GSA's Public Buildings Service and the customer agency for a specific space assignment and serves as the billing document on which subsequent rent payments are based. A customer agency means any department, agency, or independent establishment in the Federal Government, including any wholly owned corporation, and any establishment in the legislative agency or judicial branch of the Government (except the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the Architect of the Capitol, and any activities under their direction). 41 C.F.R. § 102-85.35.

review of the data for omissions and errors, we determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of examining the characteristics of the administrative space occupied by the judiciary's court units and federal public defender organizations for fiscal years 2021 through 2025.

To assess the extent to which the judiciary measures the utilization of its administrative space, we surveyed the 13 judiciary circuit executives who represent each of the 12 circuit courts of appeals nationwide and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.[12] We asked them about their court units' and federal public defender organizations' use of data to review occupancy levels and to calculate the utilization of their administrative space.[13] We administered the web-based survey in March 2026 and received a 100 percent response rate. Prior to administering the survey, to determine if the survey questions (both closed- and open-ended) were understandable, measured what we intended, and would not be burdensome on respondents, we interviewed a circuit executive who was not familiar with our review. On the basis of feedback from the pretest, we modified the questions as appropriate. After receiving responses from all 13 circuit executives, we reviewed the completed responses for missing values and unclear responses and followed up with survey respondents, as needed, to obtain additional or clarifying information.

We also selected a non-generalizable sample of nine federal judiciary facilities based on several factors, such as variety in the amount and types of administrative space in the facility, facility age, geographic location, and facility ownership.[14] We interviewed judiciary officials from

[12]While the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit is not part of our definition of administrative space, we elected to survey all circuit executives nationwide to confirm whether anyone in the judiciary reviewed occupancy levels to calculate utilization.

[13]Specifically, our main question asked if any court units or federal public defender organizations in their circuit use occupancy data from any of 12 listed sources to regularly (i.e., on a consistent time interval, such as monthly, quarterly, or annually) review the occupancy level of their administrative space. They were asked to respond "yes," "no," or "do not know." If the data were generally available but not used to regularly review the occupancy level of administrative space, they were instructed to select "no." If they were unable to confirm whether any court units used a specific form of occupancy data, they were instructed to select "do not know." If they selected "yes" to any source, they received follow-up questions. All respondents were also asked to provide open-ended responses to a question about what challenges, if any, the court units and federal public defender organizations in their circuit have faced or might face in collecting data on the occupancy of administrative spaces.

[14]See appendix I for additional information on the nine selected facilities and their characteristics, as well as the type and amount of administrative space in each.

the nine selected facilities to understand how they make decisions about the use of space in their court units and federal public defender organizations, the information used to make those decisions, and challenges associated with doing so. We also visited four of the nine facilities to obtain illustrative examples of how the judiciary uses administrative space.[15]

Lastly, we reviewed relevant judiciary and GSA policies and guidance and interviewed AOUSC and GSA officials to describe the process the judiciary uses to make decisions about its use of administrative space and the extent to which the judiciary's existing process includes measuring occupancy or calculating utilization.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2025 to September 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

[15]At each of the four facilities, we also interviewed officials and viewed administrative space in facilities that were connected to or near the selected facility. Specifically: in the Northern District of Illinois, we selected the Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and observed space in the nearby John C. Kluczynski Federal Building; in the Central District of California, we selected the Bankruptcy Court Building, and observed space in the connected George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse as well as space in the nearby Riverside Metro Center facility; in the Eastern District of Missouri, we selected the Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse and observed space in the nearby 1010 Market Street building; and in the District of the District of Columbia, we selected the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse and observed space in the connected William B. Bryant Annex.

# Background

## Federal Judiciary Structure

Federal courthouses and facilities support the federal judicial system, which is responsible for exercising the judiciary power of the United States, that includes, for example, interpreting and applying the laws and the Constitution of the United States. The federal judiciary consists of the U.S. Supreme Court, 13 appellate courts, 94 district courts (organized into 12 regional circuits), 90 bankruptcy courts, and courts of special jurisdiction.[16] Courts are supported by court units, such as bankruptcy and district clerks' offices and probation and pretrial services offices. The judiciary also includes 83 federal defender organizations and four national agencies of judicial administration, including the AOUSC.[17]

## Administration of the Federal Judiciary

Governance of the judiciary is largely decentralized. At the national level, the Judicial Conference of the United States is the judiciary's policy making body for the federal courts.[18] The Judicial Conference works through committees established along subject matter lines, such as the Committee on Space and Facilities, to recommend national policies and legislation on federal judicial administration.

The AOUSC is a national agency within the judiciary that handles the nonjudicial, administrative business of the U.S. Courts and is responsible for carrying out the policies of the Judicial Conference. The AOUSC provides a broad range of legislative, legal, technological, financial, management, administrative, and program support services to federal courts. This includes supervising administrative matters of the courts,

[16]Courts of special jurisdiction include the U.S. Court of International Trade and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.

[17]Federal defender organizations represent defendants who are financially unable to obtain counsel in federal criminal proceedings and include both federal public defender organizations and nonprofit community defender organizations. Federal public defender organizations are federal entities, and their staffs are federal judiciary employees. According to a judiciary overview of defender organizations, community defender organizations are non-profit defense counsel organizations incorporated under state laws. They receive federal grants directly for staff and space and operate under the supervision of a board of directors and may be a branch or division of a parent non-profit legal services corporation, according to the judiciary. We did not include community defender organizations in our review. The four national agencies of judicial administration are the AOUSC, Federal Judicial Center, U.S. Sentencing Commission, and Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation.

[18]See, 28 U.S.C. §§ 331, 2073.

administering appropriations provided for court operations, and providing accommodations for the courts.

At the regional level, circuit judicial councils in each geographic circuit are responsible for overseeing the administration of the courts located in their circuit. They have authority over and responsibility for their respective circuit's space-management program and for determining the space needs of court units in their circuit, among other duties. Each circuit judicial council appoints a circuit executive to assist the council in carrying out its administrative responsibilities, including approving space criteria and certain budget allotments.[19] In some circuits, the role includes delegated responsibility for signing occupancy agreements for all space changes, except for major projects that exceed established dollar thresholds and built-to-suit lease projects.[20]

At the local level, day-to-day responsibility for judicial administration rests within each individual court. The Director of the AOUSC delegates responsibility for many administrative matters to the individual courts under the judiciary's decentralized operating model. This is designed to allow individual courts to have considerable authority and flexibility to conduct their work, establish budget priorities, make business decisions, hire staff, make purchases, and manage court records, consistent with Judicial Conference policies. Court unit executives, such as the clerk of court, manage the court's administrative functions in accordance with policies set by the court. Federal public defenders, who serve as the executive of federal public defender organizations, have similar responsibilities.

[19]See, 28 U.S.C. § 332(e).

[20]The AOUSC's *Asset Management Planning Process Handbook* defines a built-to-suit lease as a lease contract in which the landlord agrees to construct a new building to house the functions of a tenant, in return for the tenant's agreement to occupy the building under a long-term lease agreement.

## GSA and the Judiciary

GSA is the government's landlord and manages real property for many federal agencies and the majority of the judiciary. The judiciary owns no buildings and has no independent real property authority.[21] Instead, it operates in 386 federally owned facilities managed by GSA (totaling about 25.8 million usable square feet), 370 commercially owned facilities (totaling about 4.3 million usable square feet), and 16 U.S. Postal Service owned facilities (totaling about 418.9 thousand usable square feet), as of fiscal year 2025. For space in facilities that are federally owned, in consultation with the AOUSC and circuit judicial councils, GSA enters into occupancy agreements with the judiciary for its use of the space. For space in facilities that are not federally owned, in consultation with the AOUSC and circuit judicial councils, GSA enters into two separate agreements for such leased space: a lease with the building owner and a separate occupancy agreement with the judiciary governing the judiciary's use of the space. GSA also executes major repair and alteration projects at existing courthouses and federal buildings.[22] Federal entities that operate in facilities under the jurisdiction, custody, or control of GSA, including the judiciary, pay rent to GSA for the space they occupy. When the judiciary determines it no longer needs space, it may return space to GSA if certain criteria are met, such as if the occupancy agreement is cancelable and the space is marketable.[23]

## National Policies

Several national level policies and guidance govern how the judiciary makes decisions about the use of its space, as shown in table 1. In 2013, the Judicial Conference approved several space reduction initiatives to reduce future space and facilities costs. Under these initiatives, the

[21]In February 2026, the judiciary sought authority from Congress, independent of GSA, to manage and maintain judiciary space in certain federally owned and leased properties. See U.S. Courts, *Judiciary Says Courthouses Are in Crisis, Seeks Real Property Authority* (Feb. 24, 2026), https://www.uscourts.gov/data-news/judiciary-news/2026/02/24/judiciary-says-courthouses-are-crisis-seeks-real-property-authority. In July 2026, legislation was introduced in Congress titled the Judicial Space and Facilities Management Effectiveness Act of 2026, to improve the maintenance, alteration, and construction of United States courthouses. This legislation includes a pilot program for transfer of jurisdiction, custody, and control of certain judicial branch accommodations to the Director of the AOUSC. S. 5194, 119th Cong. (July 30, 2026).

[22]GSA also is responsible for managing construction of new courthouses.

[23]See, 41 C.F.R. § 102-85.75. According to GSA's *Pricing Desk Guide*, a block of space is considered marketable if it can be assigned to another federal customer agency or to a private sector tenant and meets a minimum size where the space is of a configuration and size to limit layout to office suites as opposed to individual offices. According to judiciary officials, additional considerations, such as security, have to be taken into account when returning space to GSA in courthouses.

judiciary aimed to reduce its total space by 3 percent by the end of fiscal year 2018, which it met. In addition, the Judicial Conference adopted a No Net New policy in 2013, which requires circuits to offset any increases in usable square footage with equivalent space reductions in the same fiscal year.[24]

**Table 1: Policies and Processes That Guide Space-Use Decisions for Federal Court Units and Federal Public Defender Organizations**

| Policy or guidance | Description |
|---|---|
| *U.S. Courts Design Guide* | The *U.S. Courts Design Guide* contains the judiciary's space requirements for the design, construction, and renovation of court facilities. It is intended to be used by judges, planners, architects, engineers, General Services Administration (GSA) personnel, and court administrators who are involved in court construction projects. Existing facilities are not required to be updated to meet current *U.S. Courts Design Guide* standards. |
| National Space Reduction Policies | The Judicial Conference approved several initiatives in 2013 to reduce space and facilities costs, including:<br>• National space reduction target: reduce total space by 3 percent by the end of fiscal year 2018, which judiciary met.<br>• No Net New policy: any increase in usable square footage within a circuit must be offset by an equivalent reduction identified in the same fiscal year. To help reduce space to the greatest extent possible, a circuit can "bank" space released in excess of its target for use in fiscal years beyond 2018 to offset acquisitions of new space in compliance with the No Net New policy. There is no time limit on how long a space can be "banked." |
| Asset Management Planning Process and Business Rules | The Asset Management Planning process guides the judiciary's long-range facilities planning process and is used to determine the judiciary's space needs. It includes an assessment of how well each courthouse meets operational needs through the on-site collection and analysis of caseload and employee data.<br>The judiciary's Asset Management Planning Business Rules were developed to guide the Asset Management Planning process, provide a framework to identify planning alternatives and housing strategies that optimize existing court facilities, support operational needs, and ensure cost efficiency and effectiveness. |
| Circuit Rent Budget Program and Rules | The Circuit Rent Budget program is a cost containment tool aimed at improving the judiciary's ability to control space cost and growth. Circuit judicial councils are responsible for determining how certain budget resources reserved for rent are expended and encouraged to consider how expended funds will result in a higher utilization rate of square feet per person. Under the Circuit Rent Budget business rules, circuits may use some funds for alteration projects that would lead to more efficient utilization of existing space, release of space to GSA, or avoidance of space growth for expanding needs. |
| Other Policies | Relevant GSA policies may guide space decisions, such as GSA's *Pricing Desk Guide*, which includes policies used by GSA to price real estate, as well as factors for determining marketability to release space. |

Source: GAO analysis of information and interviews with the judiciary. | GAO-26-108603

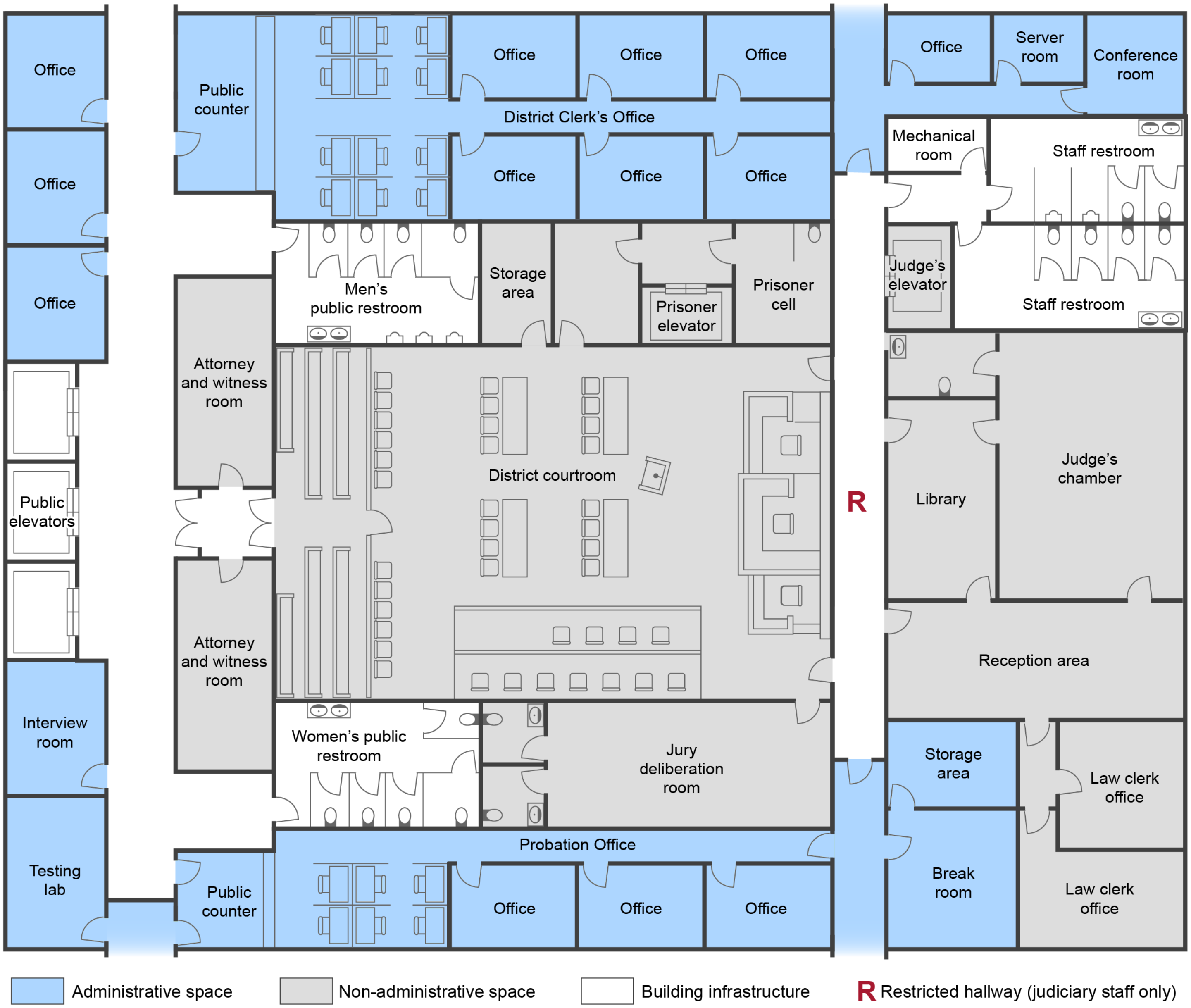
[24]New courthouse construction and renovation or alteration projects approved by Congress are subject to exclusions from the No Net New policy. *Guide to Judiciary Policy*, Vol. 16, Ch. 1 (March 2025).

Further, in 2014, the judiciary implemented its Integrated Workplace Initiative. The initiative provides options for court units to reconfigure and reduce space under alternative workplace strategies in a way that complements a mobile workforce, collaborative work environments, and modern information technologies.

## Administrative Space

Administrative space is found in both courthouses and in other buildings in which the judiciary occupies space, such as commercially owned office buildings. In courthouses, a courthouse floor often includes a mix of both administrative and non-administrative space. See figure 1 for an example of how these spaces might appear in a courthouse. In non-courthouse buildings where the judiciary occupies space, the judiciary may have only one or a mix of administrative space and non-administrative space.

**Figure 1: Example of Administrative Space and Non-Administrative Space on a Typical Courthouse Floor**




Source: GAO analysis of judiciary information. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The floorplan is not meant to depict an actual courthouse design; instead, it is intended to provide an example of how the court units in our definition of administrative space have a variety of space types within them and that the space may be spread throughout a courthouse floor. For the purposes of this review, we defined administrative space as all space assigned to the courts of appeals clerks' and central legal staff offices, circuit executives' offices, district clerks' offices, bankruptcy clerks' offices, bankruptcy administrators' offices, probation offices, pretrial services offices, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts' space within General Services Administration managed buildings, and federal public defender organizations. According to judiciary officials, prisoner holding areas and elevators are typically occupied and paid for by the U.S. Marshals Service.

A variety of professionals use administrative space to support the judiciary's mission. This includes, but is not limited to, clerks of court, attorneys, paralegals, investigators, court reporters, courtroom deputies, probation officers, pretrial services officers, and others who support the daily operations and management of the courts. For example, operational staff might include budget, finance, human resources, and information technology professionals. Additionally, non-employees, such as the public and officials from other government agencies, might enter and use certain administrative space, depending on the court unit or federal public defender organization. These individuals can include clients, litigants, and federal law enforcement officers, such as the U.S. Marshals Service.[25]

## Administrative Space Is a Sizeable Portion of the Judiciary's Total Space

### Forty Percent of the Judiciary's Space Is Administrative Space

Our analysis of judiciary data showed that in fiscal year 2025, 40 percent of the judiciary's footprint was administrative space, totaling 12.2 million usable square feet. The administrative space was located in 716 of the 772 facilities the judiciary occupied nationwide. That space was in 373 federally owned facilities managed by GSA, 328 commercially owned facilities, and 15 U.S. Postal Service owned facilities.[26] The age of these facilities varied: while the oldest was 231 years old, the newest was built in 2025.

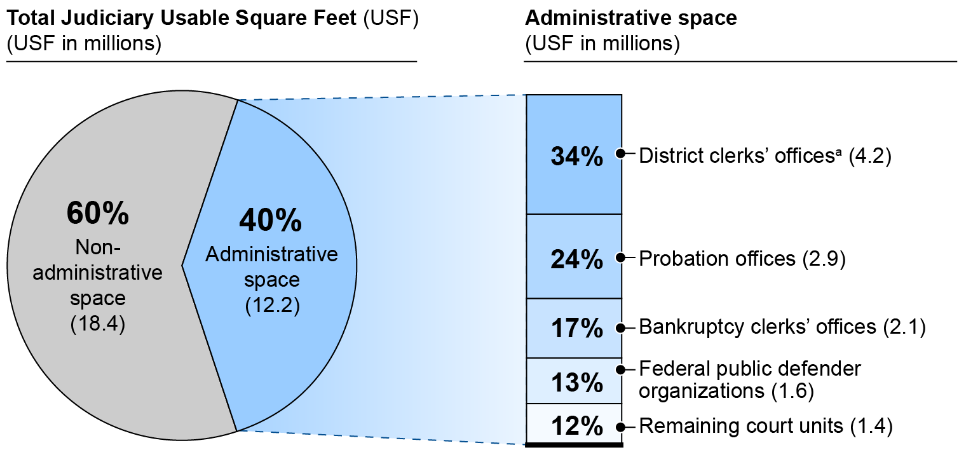
Three court units and the federal public defender organizations occupied the vast majority of the judiciary's administrative space. Specifically, of the 12.2 million usable square feet of administrative space, the district clerks' offices, probation offices, bankruptcy clerks' offices, and federal

[25]The U.S. Marshals Service is part of the Department of Justice in the executive branch. Its mission includes providing for the security of federal court facilities and the safety of judges and other court personnel.

[26]Building counts include all facilities for which the judiciary paid rent for administrative space in fiscal year 2025.

public defender organizations comprised nearly 90 percent. The other six court units occupied the remaining space (see fig. 2).

**Figure 2: The Federal Judiciary's Fiscal Year 2025 Administrative Space Distribution, in Usable Square Feet**




Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The remaining court units include the courts of appeals clerks' offices (including bankruptcy appellate panels), courts of appeals central legal staff, circuit executives' offices, bankruptcy administrators' offices, pretrial services offices, and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. USF includes the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and conference rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces such as mechanical rooms, building common areas, and some building circulation areas such as public hallways, and public toilets. The USF reflects the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025.

[a]The district clerks' offices include the district executives.

Our analysis also found that administrative space was the sole type of space in over a third of judiciary-occupied facilities in fiscal year 2025. Specifically, 272 of the 772 judiciary facilities contained only administrative space, meaning they did not have any courtrooms, judge's chambers, or other non-administrative space. Most of these facilities were commercially owned (234 facilities, totaling about 1.8 million usable square feet), followed by federally owned (36 facilities, totaling about 302 thousand usable square feet), and U.S. Postal Service owned (2 facilities, totaling about 1,700 usable square feet). Federal public defender organizations and probation offices occupied about 96 percent of the judiciary's space in the 234 commercially owned facilities. Per the judiciary's *U.S. Courts Design Guide*, federal public defender organizations' staffed offices should be located outside a courthouse unless the federal public defender determines that being in such buildings would comprise the organization's mission.[27]

## Total Administrative Space Square Footage and Rent Have Changed Minimally in Recent Years

Our analysis of federal judiciary space data showed that the total usable square feet of the judiciary's administrative space decreased 1 percent from fiscal year 2021 through 2025, while the judiciary's non-administrative space decreased less than 1 percent. Specifically, we found seven of the 10 court units' usable square feet decreased over that time frame, with the two court units with the least amount of usable square feet seeing the largest decreases (see table 2). Additionally, usable square feet for three court units increased over the five fiscal years. Proportionally, administrative space consistently comprised 40 percent of the judiciary's total space over this time period.

**Table 2: Total Usable Square Feet (USF) for the Federal Judiciary's Administrative Space by Court Unit, Fiscal Year (FY) 2021–2025 (in thousands)**

| Court Unit | FY2021 (USF) | FY2025 (USF) | Percent change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Circuit Executives' Offices | 212 | 226 | 7% |
| Federal Public Defender Organizations | 1,535 | 1,601 | 4% |
| District Clerks' Offices[a] | 4,168 | 4,193 | 1% |
| Courts of Appeals Clerks' Offices[b] | 389 | 386 | -1% |
| Courts of Appeals Central Legal Staff | 245 | 243 | -1% |
| Bankruptcy Clerks' Offices | 2,128 | 2,091 | -2% |
| Probation Offices | 2,991 | 2,926 | -2% |
| Pretrial Services Offices | 438 | 417 | -5% |
| Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts | 80 | 55 | -31% |
| Bankruptcy Administrators' Offices | 150 | 94 | -37% |
| **Total** | **12,336** | **12,233** | **-1%** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: Percent change and totals are calculated on unrounded numbers; as a result, numbers may not sum to totals. USF includes the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and conference rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces such as mechanical rooms, building common areas, and some building circulation areas such as public hallways, and

[27]Judicial Conference of the United States, *U.S. Courts Design Guide* (March 2021). If approved for a staffed office location inside a courthouse, the federal public defender organization should be distanced from the offices of the U.S attorney. Federal public defender organizations also have a trial preparation suite in district courthouses for use by federal public defenders during trial. We reviewed the 2021 *U.S. Courts Design Guide* standards in GAO, *Federal Courthouse Construction: New Design Standards Will Result in Significant Size and Cost Increases,* GAO-25-106724 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 16, 2024).

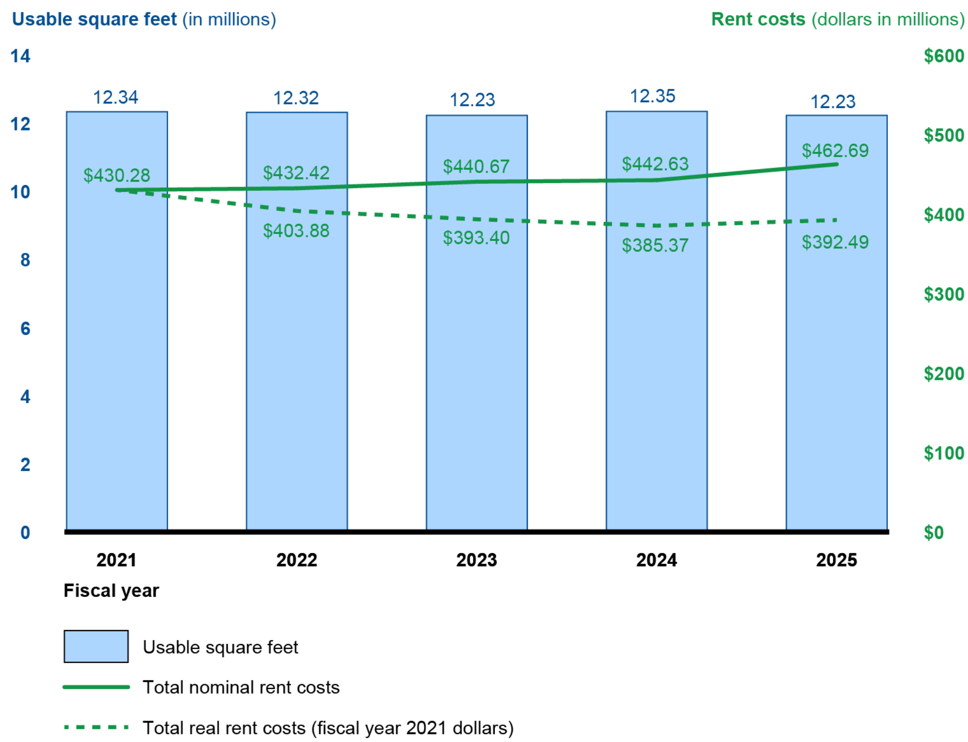
public toilets. The USF for fiscal years 2021 and 2025 are the average USF for each court unit in the respective fiscal year.

[a]District clerks' offices also include space for district executive offices.

[b]Courts of appeals clerks' offices also include space for bankruptcy appellate panels.

Our analysis of judiciary rent data showed that the total rent costs for the judiciary's administrative space increased $32.4 million from fiscal year 2021 through fiscal year 2025, an 8 percent increase in nominal dollars. However, inflation outpaced the increased rent costs. When adjusted for inflation to 2021 dollars, the rental costs for the judiciary's administrative space decreased 9 percent (see fig. 3). The proportion of annual rent payments the judiciary spent on administrative space, in both nominal and inflation adjusted dollars, remained steady—between 39 and 40 percent from fiscal year 2021 through fiscal year 2025.

**Figure 3: Total Usable Square Feet and Rent Costs for the Federal Judiciary's Administrative Space, Fiscal Years 2021–2025**




Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: These figures include the usable square feet and rent costs assigned to courts of appeals clerks' and central legal staff offices, circuit executive clerks' offices, district clerks' offices, bankruptcy clerks' offices, bankruptcy administrators' offices, probation offices, pretrial services offices, and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts' space within General Services Administration managed buildings, and federal public defender organizations. Usable square feet include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and conference rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces such as mechanical rooms, building common areas, and some building circulation areas such as public hallways, and public toilets. The usable square feet for fiscal years 2021 through 2025 are the average usable square feet for each fiscal year.

# The Judiciary Is Not Measuring the Utilization of Its Administrative Space

## The Judiciary Is Not Collecting Occupancy Data or Measuring Utilization

While the federal judiciary has data on the amount of administrative space it occupies and the associated costs, no court units or federal public defender organizations identified in our definition of administrative space collect or review data on the occupancy of their space. Without occupancy data, the judiciary is unable to measure the extent to which its administrative space is utilized, as utilization is the ratio of the average daily occupancy of a space compared to the usable square feet of the space.

In our survey of the 13 judiciary circuit executives, all responded that no court unit or federal public defender organization in their circuit used any of the 12 specified sources of occupancy data to regularly review the occupancy level of their administrative space.[28] The sources specified in our survey varied in complexity and cost, from building badge and access

[28]One circuit executive indicated they did not know if any court units or federal public defender organizations used three of the 12 sources of occupancy data to regularly review occupancy levels but responded that they are not required to do so. They also indicated that no court units or federal public defender organizations in their circuit use occupancy data to calculate the utilization of the administrative space or inform space decision-making. Eleven of the 12 sources of occupancy data we asked about align with the occupancy data collection tools GSA has identified for the 24 CFO Act agencies that are required to report occupancy and utilization rates for their buildings under the USE IT Act. These included: 1) building badge and access control systems, such as building entrance systems and door readers; 2) daily employee check-in surveys; 3) employee workspace reservation software; 4) employee time and attendance systems; 5) occupancy sensors; 6) Wi-Fi and Bluetooth aggregators that track the location of devices, such as smartphones, and by extension, occupants; 7) video cameras equipped with movement analytics software; 8) analytics platforms, such as those that integrate data from multiple occupancy sensors and systems; 9) formal visual analysis, such as regular monitoring of workspace over a defined period of time; 10) mobile location data; and 11) building automation systems, such as HVAC or lighting systems that can infer occupancy. We also asked about one source of occupancy data that GSA had not identified: employee laptop on-site network logins.

control systems to daily employee check-in surveys. We also provided an option to write in another source of occupancy data if it was not listed. None of the circuit executives identified another source of occupancy data.

In our interviews and survey responses, some court unit executives and federal public defenders told us they have access to data that are collected for other reasons and could potentially provide insight into occupancy. However, they also told us that they are not using that data to inform their space use decision-making. For example, we heard from some court unit executives and federal public defenders that their time and attendance system requires employees to note if the hours worked each day were in the office building or teleworking. However, officials noted that these data would not capture individual workspace usage and are not a requirement across the judiciary. They also said that telework policies vary by district and court unit, and the judiciary does not use the same time and attendance system across the nation.

Further, in interviews and responses to our survey, judiciary officials expressed concerns with collecting and using existing data to measure occupancy. They also told us that the resulting utilization rates may not be meaningful given how their staff do their work and how the judiciary plans and manages space. However, many of these challenges, which are discussed below, are not unique to the judiciary. The challenges also do not preclude the judiciary from measuring occupancy and calculating utilization.

**Collecting Occupancy Data.** Officials we interviewed and surveyed expressed concerns about collecting occupancy data. For example, officials told us that badge data are frequently owned and maintained by the U.S. Marshals Service—who are responsible for providing security for federal courthouses and judicial personnel—and subject to strict security protocols, privacy considerations, and interagency agreements that limit the data's availability for secondary analytical purposes. Further, in response to our survey and in interviews, some officials noted that badging systems can be costly and take years to install or update. Similarly, officials expressed concerns about the expense of installing other automated systems to use for the purposes of collecting occupancy data, such as occupancy sensors.

However, as mentioned, there are many ways to collect occupancy data, including options that have lower costs and do not require the installation of new tracking infrastructure or accessing sensitive data. For example, for the executive branch agencies that are required to track occupancy of their facilities, GSA guidelines identify lower-cost options for collecting occupancy data, such as daily check-in surveys.[29] Further, in our ongoing work on the cost of measuring building utilization in the executive branch, most executive branch agencies estimated minimal costs to meet occupancy data collection and reporting requirements under the USE IT Act.[30]

**Measuring Occupancy.** Officials expressed concern with how to measure occupancy when staff move frequently between administrative and non-administrative space throughout the day but still require the use of office space. For example, they told us that probation officers spend time in the office, in courtrooms, and in the field. Similarly, when court is in session, courtroom deputies go between courtrooms and their office throughout the day, according to judiciary officials. Officials also explained that federal public defender organization staff regularly move between their office, courtrooms, and detention facilities.

However, the judiciary has identified ways to account for staff movement when needed. For example, in setting standards for the amount of space assigned to staff under alternative workplace strategies, the judiciary's *U.S. Courts Design Guide* identifies ways to account for staff's varying levels of movement between spaces. Alternative workplace strategies allow the judiciary to reduce space use compared to their typical space requirement standards and tailor work settings to different work modes—focused work, collaborative work, and learning—of staff.[31] The *U.S. Courts Design Guide* states that determining the amount of time staff spend in each work mode requires an analysis of employee work modes, which can be conducted through both interactive means, such as surveys, and technological means, such as sensors. Further, it states that this analysis is important because the number and types of workspaces under these strategies depend on hours of occupancy rather than the number of employees.

[29]GSA published a list of 11 approved occupancy data technologies, including badging systems, occupancy sensors, daily check-in surveys, timecard analysis, and visual analysis for the 24 CFO Act agencies subject to the USE IT Act to use to measure and report on their building utilization. See General Services Administration, *USE IT Act and Occupancy Data*, https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/use-it-act-and-occupancy-data.

[30]We plan to report on this work later this year.

[31]According to judiciary officials, alternative workplace strategies are not suitable options for the work of all court units and federal public defender organizations.

**Calculating Utilization.** Officials expressed concern about the types of space that would be included in the calculation of their utilization rate. Some court units have unique spaces, such as public reception areas, urinalysis labs, and interview rooms that are part of their total usable square footage. Officials told us including such spaces in the calculation of their utilization rate would provide an artificially low rate.[32] However, the judiciary can address this concern by setting benchmarks for utilization rates that take into account that not all space is expected to be occupied daily, such as the unique spaces in some court units. For example, a benchmark that sets a utilization rate goal below 100 percent can account for spaces that are not expected to be fully utilized.[33]

Further, total usable square footage is a valuable measure when calculating utilization because it provides insight into the use of all space the judiciary is occupying and for which it is paying rent.[34] For example, on one site visit, we observed a cubicle that had been installed within a larger office to meet the *U.S. Courts Design Guide* space requirement standards for that staff person's role (as described in more detail below), while in practice the court unit was using the entire office space (see fig. 4). Judiciary officials noted that the remaining office space actively supported the court unit's operations as a workroom processing area. A utilization rate that accounts for total usable square footage of administrative space—in this example, the entire office—and not just the square footage of assigned workspace such as a cubicle, could help the judiciary develop a fuller understanding of the amount of space its court units actively use.

[32]The Office of Management and Budget guidance and GSA guidelines for the agencies subject to the USE IT Act, respectively, indicate that agencies should prioritize and report only on office space. GSA's guidelines for "typical office space" include a range of spaces such as private offices, break rooms, conference rooms, and auditoriums—but exclude specialized areas such as data centers, laboratories, and secure storage from the capacity used in utilization rate calculations. See, Office of Management and Budget, *Implementation of the Utilizing Space Efficiently and Improving Technologies Act*, M-25-25 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 21, 2025); General Services Administration, USE IT Act, Occupancy and utilization reporting guidelines, https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/use-it-act-and-occupancy-data/reporting-guidelines.

[33]For the 24 CFO Act agencies in the executive branch, the USE IT Act sets a target building utilization rate of not less than 60 percent on average based on a 150 usable square feet per person benchmark.

[34]In some facilities, the judiciary may also pay rent for some or all common areas such as restrooms, lobbies, and hallways which are not included in usable square feet calculations.

**Figure 4: A Cubicle Installed Inside a Larger Office**

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

Moreover, AOUSC officials told us that collecting occupancy data and measuring the utilization of their administrative space is not part of their existing practices because the judiciary has not identified a business need to do so. Some AOUSC officials thought measuring utilization could be helpful, while officials we interviewed at selected facilities generally did not. Some court unit executives and federal public defenders told us they are aware of how their space is utilized because they and their staff are in the office daily. However, they said they do not have or use records or data to back up their physical observations. Additionally, awareness of staff using their assigned offices does not provide insight into a court unit's use of other types of space that are not assigned to individual staff. For example, at one facility, officials told us they were considering repurposing a room that is used for printing and storage, but because they had no records on how frequently both functions were used, they had to assign someone to sit in it over several days to record its use.

In practice, on our site visits and in interviews, officials we met with told us they adjust how they use their space, as needed, when staffing levels or functions change. For example, court unit officials in multiple facilities described how they reconfigured space within their court unit's existing usable square footage to accommodate increased staffing. In more than one facility, officials told us they had erected temporary walls to create additional workstations, sometimes turning conference or meeting rooms into offices or cubicles. We observed one such altered conference room, with an accordion partition to create an office at the end of the room (see fig. 5). Officials also told us that these solutions were often more cost effective and could be implemented more quickly than more permanent changes that required coordination with GSA.

**Staffing Allocations**

Judiciary officials told GAO that they make changes to their administrative space in part in response to changes in staffing levels.

Each fiscal year, officials in the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts update each court unit's and federal public defender organization's staffing allocation. They do this using mathematical formulas that account for the unit's underlying caseload, judgeships, and other related statistical information. The mathematical formulas are typically updated every 5 years and approved by the Judicial Conference. This process determines the staffing allocations for each court unit and federal public defender organization. Judiciary officials then use the staffing allocations to calculate, approve, and disburse final salary allotment dollars.

In GAO interviews, some judiciary officials emphasized that not all court units and federal public defender organizations operate at their full staffing allocation. For example, one court unit official told GAO that his office regularly operates at 80 percent of its staffing allocation due to difficulty hiring.

Source: GAO interviews with judiciary officials. I GAO-26-108603

**Figure 5: An Accordion Wall Partitions off Space in a Conference Room to Create an Office**

An office created at the end of a conference room with a temporary accordion back wall.

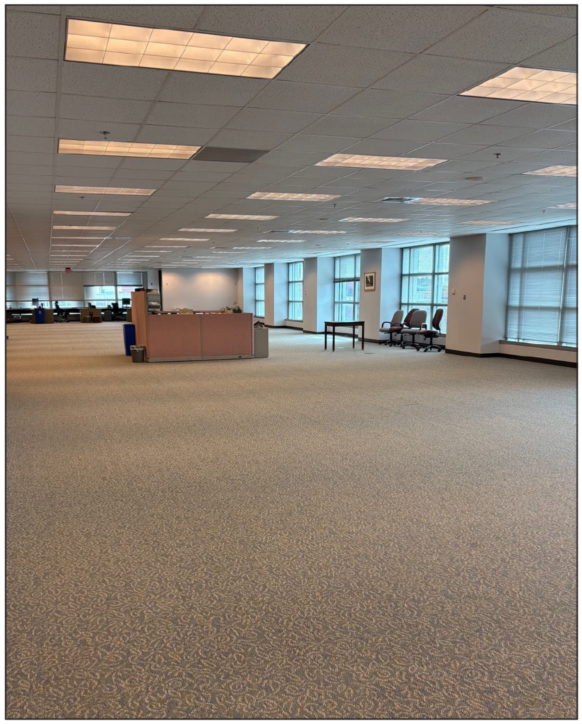
The same accordion wall from the opposite side, showing the conference side of the room.

Source: GAO. I GAO-26-108603

Additionally, multiple officials described having excess space they are in the process of releasing back to GSA or repurposing due to functional changes in how the space was used.[35] Officials told us these changes cannot be made in response to monthly or annual fluctuations in utilization because they may involve coordination with their respective circuit judicial council, the AOUSC, and GSA, and need to align with their existing leasing requirements. For example, in one facility, we observed a large area of vacant space that previously housed cabinets for over 80,000 case files that were destroyed after being digitized (see fig. 6). Officials told us they had been working with the AOUSC and GSA to release space back to GSA and reconfigure the remainder of their existing space to better suit their current space needs. However, they explained that GSA will have to agree that the space is marketable before the court unit is able to release it. Officials also told us that the process of releasing space back to GSA can be difficult and take multiple years.

[35]Under specified circumstances, GSA customer agencies can terminate any space assignments, except those designated as non-cancelable, with certain stipulations, including that the agency must give GSA written notice at least 4 months prior to termination, and if the agency has vacated all of the space and removed all personal property and equipment from the space by the cancellation date in the written notice, the agency will be released effective that date from further rent payments. See, 41 C.F.R. 102-85.75.

Figure 6: Vacant Space That Previously Housed Cabinets for Case File Storage



Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

Similarly, officials told us that upcoming lease renewals create an opportunity to reevaluate their existing space. For example, officials from one facility noted that their probation office has been in existing leased space since 1992. However, they explained that the lease was coming up for renewal, which would provide them an opportunity to reassess their space needs. The officials told us that due to changes in staffing levels and workload over the period of the lease they are now planning to return space upon the lease's renewal.

## Measuring Utilization Could Bolster Decision-Making and Help Maximize the Use of Space

Although the judiciary is not measuring the utilization of its administrative space, judiciary policies and guidance identify the importance of maximizing the use of its space and taking a data-based approach when doing so. For example:

- The *Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary* includes a priority for the efficient and effective management of public resources.[36] One of the two strategies within this priority emphasizes that cost containment remains a high priority for the judiciary.
- The judiciary's Asset Management Planning process was developed to 1) identify current and future space needs; 2) identify strategies that maximize the use of existing facilities; 3) provide an objective means of analysis to determine strategies that provide the greatest support for the judiciary's operations at the least cost and risk; and 4) provide a prioritized list of facilities based on the urgency of the facilities' space needs.[37] This is all done within the framework of the judiciary's No Net New policy, which mandates that any increase in square footage within a circuit be offset by an equivalent reduction in square footage identified within the same fiscal year.
- The judiciary's *U.S. Courts Design Guide* states that accurate data and justifiable assumptions are essential to maximize the cost-effectiveness of housing strategies to meet the court's short and long-term needs.[38]

[36]Judicial Conference of the United States, *Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary*, (Washington, D.C.: September 2025).

[37]*Guide to Judiciary Policy*, Vol. 16, Ch. 1.

[38]Judicial Conference of the United States, *U.S. Courts Design Guide*.

Measuring the utilization of administrative space across the judiciary's facilities would be consistent with and enhance the systematic approaches the judiciary has established for assessing space that include other types of objective data to compare spaces nationwide and aid in decision-making. For example:

- **Asset Management Planning Process.** One part of the judiciary's Asset Management Planning process includes a physical facility assessment of court units' space to determine how well a facility supports the needs and operations of the court (see sidebar for additional information about this process). While two components of the facility assessment focus on space standards and functionality, they do not include an evaluation of space occupancy or utilization. Instead, they focus on the facilities' degree of conformance with the *U.S. Courts Design Guide* and if the facility can support projected judgeships and personnel. For example, the facility assessment of one selected facility noted that three court units each had office space split across multiple floors, with public (as opposed to secure) access between the areas.
- **U.S. Courts Design Guide**. The *U.S. Courts Design Guide* includes net square feet space requirements for private offices, workstations, public areas, and general office and support spaces for the judiciary's various court units (see table 3).[39] These standards apply to new facilities, and existing space does not need to be changed to meet current *U.S. Courts Design Guide* standards.

**Long-Range Facilities Planning**

The judiciary uses an approach to facilities planning called the Asset Management Planning process. According to the judiciary, the process is a cost-containment initiative aimed at identifying and prioritizing space needs using an objective, standardized methodology. It results in a long-range facilities plan that recommends strategies to address short- and long-term space needs, maximize the use of existing facilities, and support cost containment for courthouses. The long-range facilities plans can take up to 1 year to complete and plan 15 years into the future.

The process and development of a long-range facility plan includes: an assessment of how well each courthouse and nearby facilities meet a court's operational needs, the collection and analysis of caseload and employee data, on-site interviews, and the identification of space needs.

As part of the process, a facility benefit assessment is developed. The facility benefit assessment includes four weighted categories: building condition, space functionality, security, and space standards.

The process also identifies the costs and benefits of alternative space housing strategies. One or more strategies for each court location are identified and evaluated within each long-range facility plan. Per Asset Management Planning business rules, housing strategies within the court's existing footprint are explored first before housing strategies in expansion space are considered. Any new space acquisition must comply with the judiciary's No Net New policy and all related circuit space management policies.

Source: GAO review of judiciary documents. I GAO-26-108603

[39]Per the Judiciary's *U.S. Courts Design Guide*, net square feet represent the actual occupied area of a floor, not including accessory unoccupied areas (e.g., stairs, elevator and HVAC shafts, mechanical rooms) or the thickness of walls.

**Table 3: Examples of Federal Judiciary *U.S. Courts Design Guide* Space Requirements**

| Space category | Types of space | Space requirement (net square feet) |
|---|---|---|
| Private offices | Clerk | 240 |
| | Manager | 180 |
| | Professional administrative and line positions | 150 |
| Open workstations | Operational and administrative first-line supervisors | 96 |
| | Operational and administrative court support positions | 64 |
| General office spaces | Conference room < 20 occupants | 300 |
| | Staff breakroom | 200-600 |
| Public areas | Waiting area, small/medium/large courthouse | 100/150/180 |
| | Public counter and clerk workstation, small/medium/large courthouse | 100/150/250 |
| Special office spaces | Evidence vaults | 80-150 |
| | Shared interview room | 120 |
| Shared support spaces | Central mail facility, small/medium/large courthouse | 880/880/1100 |
| | IT equipment storage, small/medium/large courthouse | 150/250/550 |

Source: GAO summary of the *U.S. Courts Design Guide* (March 2021). | GAO-26-108603

In August 2025, the Director of AOUSC sent a memorandum to the Chief Judges of the U.S. Courts and circuit and court unit executives informing them of an effort to optimize its use of space across the federal judiciary, including identifying opportunities for space realignment and optimization resulting in potential cost savings. It stated that the AOUSC, at the direction of the Judicial Conference Committee on Space and Facilities, had completed a preliminary nationwide analysis of courts' and court units' current uses of space and would be collaborating with circuit and court unit executives to validate the analysis and its underlying data. Judiciary officials told us the analysis included staffing and usable square footage data, but it did not include utilization data. Further, they told us that a timeline for the effort had not been established.

Because the judiciary does not have occupancy data to determine utilization rates, the judiciary is not best positioned to achieve its ongoing effort's goal of optimizing space nationwide or its strategic plan priority to contain costs. Utilization rates provide a quantitative measure of the amount of space regularly used per employee, and incorporating such a measure and related benchmarks could allow the judiciary to make more informed decisions about the use of its administrative space and supplement existing efforts to maximize the efficient use of such space. Measuring the utilization of its administrative space could help the judiciary:

- gain valuable insight into the amount of space used per employee as compared to industry and executive branch standards;
- evaluate and compare court units' use of space across the nation in ways they are not currently able to;
- develop appropriate benchmarks for identifying underutilized space in the judiciary; and
- identify opportunities to reduce underutilized space, maximizing the efficient use of space and resources, including potentially realizing cost savings.

## Conclusions

The judiciary has various policies and guidance that emphasize the importance of maximizing the use of its space, for which it spent over $1 billion in rent costs in fiscal year 2025. Forty percent of the judiciary's space is administrative space, and the judiciary does not measure the utilization of this space. Measuring the utilization of its administrative space could enhance the judiciary's decision-making process about the use of its administrative space, allowing for internal and external comparisons and opportunities to identify potentially underutilized space. This insight could allow the judiciary to better maximize the use of its space, help ensure it is not wasting resources by leasing more space than it needs, and potentially realize cost savings. It could also align the judiciary with broader efforts across the federal government to better understand the utilization of federal space.

## Recommendation

The Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts should establish procedures to collect occupancy data and calculate the utilization of the judiciary's administrative space. Such data should be collected at an established, regular interval, include the development of benchmarks for utilization rates, and be incorporated into the judiciary's space use decision-making processes. (Recommendation 1)

## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the AOUSC and GSA for review and comment. In its comments, reproduced in appendix II, the AOUSC reiterated its ongoing space-savings initiatives and stated that it continues to evaluate its space needs and the utilization of existing space in light of changing operational requirements and work practices. The AOUSC stated it will carefully consider the report's findings and recommendation and will coordinate with the Judicial Conference of the United States, as appropriate, regarding any matters requiring further consideration. We believe that implementing our recommendation to collect occupancy data and calculate the utilization of its administrative space would help the judiciary better understand and maximize the use of that space as it continues its optimization efforts. The AOUSC also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. GSA did not have any comments on the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the Administrator of the General Services Administration, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at MarroniD@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

//SIGNED//

David Marroni
Director, Physical Infrastructure

# Appendix I: Facility Profiles

We created profiles for the nine judiciary facilities we selected for our review to summarize the administrative space in each facility.[1] For the four facilities where the team conducted site visits, we also included information about adjacent facilities we visited.[2] We obtained and analyzed fiscal year 2025 judiciary data to highlight descriptive information about the characteristics of these facilities, such as their age, ownership type, and location. Based on our analysis of these data, we also describe the amount of administrative and total space the judiciary occupied and the associated rent costs for court units that fall under our definition of administrative space.[3] For the purposes of our review, we defined administrative space as all space assigned to the courts of appeals clerks' and central legal staff offices, circuit executives' offices, district clerks' offices, bankruptcy clerks' offices, bankruptcy administrators' offices, probation offices, pretrial services offices, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts within General Services Administration managed buildings, and federal public defender organizations.

[1]We selected the nine federal judiciary facilities based on several factors, such as variety in the amount and types of administrative space in the facility, facility age, geographic location, and facility ownership.

[2]At each of the four facilities, we also interviewed officials and viewed administrative space in facilities that were connected to or near the selected facility. Specifically: in the Northern District of Illinois, we selected the Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and observed space in the nearby John C. Kluczynski Federal Building; in the Central District of California, we selected the Bankruptcy Court Building, and observed space in the connected George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse as well as space in the nearby Riverside Metro Center facility; in the Eastern District of Missouri, we selected the Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse and observed space in the nearby 1010 Market Street building; and in the District of the District of Columbia, we selected the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Courthouse and observed space in the connected William B. Bryant Annex.

[3]We calculated the usable square footage for each fiscal year by summing the average monthly usable square footage for each occupancy agreement. We used the average because occupancy agreements can change during a fiscal year, resulting in increases and decreases in the usable square footage. Usable square feet include the portion of a building that is available for occupants (e.g., offices, team rooms, and conference rooms) but might not include building infrastructure spaces such as mechanical rooms, building common areas, and some building circulation areas such as public hallways and public toilets.

# Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and John C. Kluczynski Federal Building in Chicago, IL


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facilities at a Glance

Dirksen U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Year Built: 1964
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 593,974 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $19.4 million
- Total Administrative Space: 115,767 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $4.6 million

Kluczynski Federal Building[a]

- Year Built: 1974
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 26,774 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $1.1 million[b]
- Total Administrative Space: 26,774 usable square feet[c]
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $1 million[c]

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.

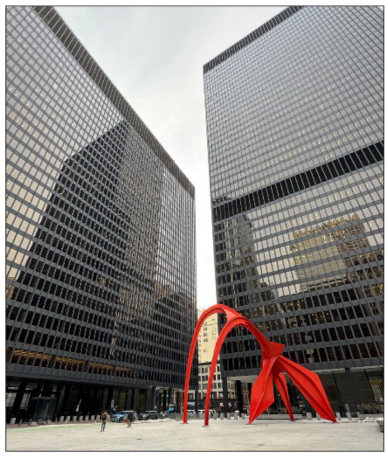
[b]In fiscal year 2025, a court unit that does not fall under the GAO definition of administrative space for this review paid rent for parking space in the Kluczynski Federal Building that has zero associated usable square feet.

[c]All judiciary occupied space in the Kluczynski Federal building falls under the GAO definition of adminstrative space for this review.

## Facility Characteristics

The Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse is a 62-year old federal courthouse in Chicago, Illinois. Administrative space accounts for 19 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across six different court units. The John C. Kluczynski Federal Building is a 52-year old office building adjacent to the Dirksen courthouse. All of the judiciary's space in this facility is administrative space across two court units. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its adminstrative space in these two buildings totaled about $5.6 million.

**Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse (left) and John C. Kluczynski Federal Building (right), Chicago, IL**



Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and Kluczynski Federal Building, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse | | |
| District Clerk's Office | 52.8 | $2,098 |
| Court of Appeals Central Legal Staff | 38.1 | $1,509 |
| Bankruptcy Clerk's Office | 8.5 | $343 |
| Pretrial Services Office | 8.0 | $316 |
| Court of Appeals Clerk's Office | 6.3 | $252 |
| Circuit Executive's Office | 2.0 | $80 |
| **Total** | **115.8** | **$4,599** |
| John C. Kluczynski Federal Building | | |
| Probation Office | 22.9 | $894 |
| District Clerk's Office | 3.9 | $152 |
| **Total** | **26.8** | **$1,046** |
| **Grand total** | **142.5** | **$5,644** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets. Total USF and rent costs may not add up to the facilities' total values due to rounding.


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facilities at a Glance

Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Year Built: 2000
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 455,672 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $10 million
- Total Administrative Space: 158,101 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $4.1 million

1010 Market Street[a]

- Ownership: Commercially owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 18,898 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $636,000
- Total Administrative Space: 18,898 usable square feet[c]
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $636,000[c]

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[b]Year built for facilities that are not federally owned is not provided by the General Services Administration in facility data shared with the judiciary.

[c]All judiciary occupied space in 1010 Market Street falls under the GAO definition of adminstrative space for this review.

Appendix I

# Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse and 1010 Market Street Building in St. Louis, MO

## Facility Characteristics

The Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse is a 26-year old federal courthouse in St. Louis, Missouri. Adminstrative space accounts for 35 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across seven different court units and the federal public defender organization. The 1010 Market Street Building is a commerically owned office building adjacent to the Eagleton courthouse. All of the judiciary's space in this facility is administrative space in the federal public defender organization. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in these two buildings totaled about $4.7 million.

**Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse (left) and 1010 Market Street Building (right), St. Louis, MO**

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse and 1010 Market Street Building, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse | | |
| District Clerk's Office | 47.5 | $1,232 |
| Probation Office | 28.5 | $805 |
| Bankruptcy Clerk's Office | 34.6 | $791 |
| Court of Appeals Clerk's Office | 14.1 | $372 |
| Circuit Executive's Office | 13.3 | $351 |
| Court of Appeals Central Legal Staff | 10.3 | $276 |
| Pretrial Services Office | 9.0 | $235 |
| Federal Public Defender Organization | 0.7 | $19 |
| **Total** | **158.1** | **$4,082** |
| 1010 Market Steet Building | | |
| Federal Public Defender Organization | 18.9 | $636 |
| **Total** | **18.9** | **$636** |
| **Grand total** | **177.0** | **$4,717** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets. Total USF and rent costs may not add up to the facilities' total values due to rounding.


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facility at a Glance

Potter Stewart U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Year Built: 1938
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 214,077 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $5 million
- Total Administrative Space: 89,332 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $2.1 million

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.



# Potter Stewart U.S. Courthouse in Cincinnati, OH

## Facility Characteristics

The Potter Stewart U.S. Courthouse is an 88-year old federal courthouse in Cincinnati, Ohio. Administrative space accounts for 42 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across six different court units. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in this building totaled about $2.1 million.

**Potter Stewart U.S. Courthouse, Cincinnati, OH**

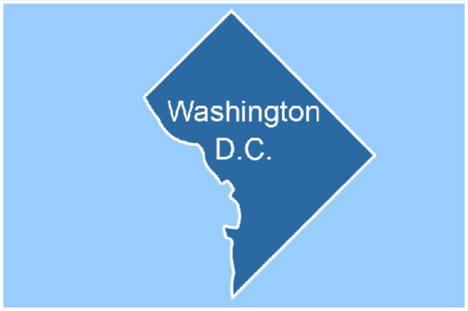

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the Potter Stewart U.S. Courthouse, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| Court of Appeals Clerk's Office | 27.0 | $627 |
| Circuit Executive's Office | 17.1 | $401 |
| Court of Appeals Central Legal Staff | 15.2 | $356 |
| District Clerk's Office | 14.8 | $349 |
| Probation Office | 12.8 | $300 |
| Pretrial Services Office | 2.5 | $58 |
| **Total** | **89.3** | **$2,091** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets. Total USF and rent costs may not add up to the facility's total values due to rounding.



Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facilities at a Glance

E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Year Built: 1952
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 329,254 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $18.3 million
- Total Administrative Space: 117,004 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $7.2 million

William B. Bryant U.S. Courthouse Annex[a]

- Year Built: 2005
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 149,516 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $11.4 million
- Total Administrative Space: 20,258 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $2.3 million

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.



# E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse and William B. Bryant U.S. Courthouse Annex in Washington, D.C.

## Facility Characteristics

The E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse is a 74-year old federal courthouse in Washington, D.C. Administrative space accounts for 36 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across five different court units. The William B. Bryant U.S. Courthouse Annex is a 21-year old annex connected to the Prettyman U.S. Courthouse. Administrative space accounts for 14 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across two different court units and the federal public defender organization. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in these two buildings totaled about $9.5 million.

**E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse (left) and William B. Bryant U.S. Courthouse Annex (right), Washington, D.C.**


Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse and William B. Bryant U.S. Courthouse Annex, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| E. Barrett Prettyman U.S. Courthouse | | |
| District Clerk's Office | 55.0 | $3,556 |
| Court of Appeals Clerk's Office | 19.0 | $1,183 |
| Circuit Executive's Office | 17.9 | $1,118 |
| Probation Office | 15.6 | $850 |
| Court of Appeals Central Legal Staff | 9.4 | $518 |
| **Total** | **117.0** | $7,226 |
| William B. Bryant U.S. Courthouse Annex | | |
| Probation Office | 16.6 | $1,598 |
| District Clerk's Office | 2.8 | $451 |
| Federal Public Defender Organization | 0.9 | $81 |
| **Total** | **20.3** | **$2,275** |
| **Grand total** | **137.3** | **$9,501** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets. Total USF and rent costs may not add up to the facilities' total values due to rounding or rent paid for parking space that has zero associated USF.


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facility at a Glance

Huntsville U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Year Built: 2024
- Ownership: Federally owned
- Total Judiciary Space: 60,578 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $5.2 million
- Total Administrative Space: 23,688 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $1.6 million

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.



# Huntsville U.S. Courthouse in Huntsville, AL

## Facility Characteristics

The Huntsville U.S. Courthouse is a 2-year old federal courthouse in Huntsville, Alabama. Administrative space accounts for about 40 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across four different court units. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in this building totaled about $1.6 million.

**Huntsville U.S. Courthouse, Huntsville, AL**

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the Huntsville U.S. Courthouse, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| District Clerk's Office | 9.6 | $655 |
| Bankruptcy Clerk's Office | 5.1 | $344 |
| Probation Office | 4.3 | $342 |
| Bankruptcy Administrator's Office | 4.7 | $302 |
| **Total** | **23.7** | **$1,643** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets.

# U.S. Courthouse in Del Rio, TX


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facility at a Glance

U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Ownership: Commercially owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 50,206 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $2.9 million
- Total Administrative Space: 27,756 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $1.6 million

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.

[b]Year built for facilities that are not federally owned is not provided by the General Services Administration in facility data shared with the judiciary.

## Facility Characteristics

The U.S. Courthouse is a commerically owned courthouse in Del Rio, Texas. Administrative space accounts for 55 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across across three different court units and the federal public defender organization. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in this building totaled about $1.6 million.

**U.S. Courthouse, Del Rio, TX**


Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the U.S. Courthouse, Del Rio, TX, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| District Clerk's Office | 11.7 | $671 |
| Probation Office | 11.2 | $666 |
| Pretrial Services Office | 4.1 | $252 |
| Federal Public Defender Organization | 0.8 | $39 |
| **Total** | **27.8** | **$1,628** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets. Total USF and rent costs may not add up to the facility's total values due to rounding.


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facilities at a Glance

George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse[a]

- Ownership: Commercially owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 39,978 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $2.2 million
- Total Administrative Space: 14,287 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $787,000

Bankruptcy Court Building[a]

- Ownership: Commercially owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 64,985 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $3.7 million
- Total Administrative Space: 34,701 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $2 million

Riverside Metro Center Building[a,c]

- Ownership: Commercially owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 7,508 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $329,000
- Total Administrative Space: 7,508 usable square feet[c]
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $329,000[c]

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[b]Year built for facilities that are not federally owned is not provided by the General Services Administration in facility data shared with the judiciary.

[c]All judiciary occupied space in Riverside Metro Center falls under the GAO definition of administrative space for this review.



# George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse and Bankruptcy Court Building and Riverside Metro Center Building in Riverside, CA

## Facility Characteristics

The George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse is a commercially owned courthouse in Riverside, California. Administrative space accounts for 36 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across two different court units and the federal public defender organization. The Bankruptcy Court building is a commercially owned building attached to the Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse. Administrative space accounts for 53 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across three different court units. The Riverside Metro Center Building is a nearby commerically owned building where all of the judiciary's space is administrative space. In fiscal year 2025, the judicary's rent for its administrative space in these three buildings totaled about $3.2 million.

**George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse (left), Bankruptcy Court Building (center), and Riverside Metro Center Building (right), Riverside, CA**

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse, Bankruptcy Court Building, and Riverside Metro Center Building, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| George E. Brown, Jr. U.S. Courthouse | | |
| District Clerk's Office | 11.3 | $625 |
| Pretrial Services Office | 2.8 | $152 |
| Federal Public Defender Organization | 0.2 | $11 |
| **Total** | **14.3** | **$787** |
| Bankruptcy Court Building | | |
| Bankruptcy Clerk's Office | 22.8 | $1,333 |
| Probation Office | 10.0 | $614 |
| District Clerk's Office | 1.8 | $88 |
| **Total** | **34.7** | **$2,036** |
| Riverside Metro Center Building | | |
| Federal Public Defender Organization | 7.5 | $329 |
| **Total** | **7.5** | **$329** |
| **Grand total** | **56** | **$3,152** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets. Total USF and rent costs may not add up to the facilities' total values due to rounding.


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facility at a Glance

Frank R. Lautenberg U.S. Post Office and Courthouse[a]

- Ownership: U.S. Postal Service owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 118,046 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $2.9 million
- Total Administrative Space: 25,371 usable square feet
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $626,000

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[b]Year built for facilities that are not federally owned is not provided by the General Services Administration in facility data shared with the judiciary.



# Frank R. Lautenberg U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in Newark, NJ

## Facility Characteristics

The Frank R. Lautenberg U.S. Post Office and U.S. Courthouse is a 92-year old U.S. Postal Service owned post office and courthouse in Newark, New Jersey. Administrative space accounts for 21 percent of the judiciary's usable square footage in the facility across two different court units. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in this building totaled about $626,000.

**Frank R. Lautenberg U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Newark, NJ**

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the Frank R. Lautenberg U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---:|---:|
| District Clerk's Office | 16.5 | $406 |
| Pretrial Services Office | 8.9 | $220 |
| **Total** | **25.4** | **$626** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets.

# 250 West Pratt Street Building in Baltimore, MD


Sources: Map Resources and GAO. | GAO-26-108603

## Facility at a Glance

250 West Pratt Street Building[a]

- Ownership: Commercially owned[b]
- Total Judiciary Space: 41,128 usable square feet
- Total Judiciary Space Rent Cost: $1.3 million
- Total Administrative Space: 41,128 usable square feet[c]
- Total Administrative Space Rent Cost: $1.3 million[c]

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

[a]All data are as of fiscal year 2025 and rent costs are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.

[b]Year built for facilities that are not federally owned is not provided by the General Services Administration in facility data shared with the judiciary.

[c]All judiciary occupied space in the 250 West Pratt Street Building falls under the GAO definition of administrative space for this review.

## Facility Characteristics

The 250 West Pratt Steet Building is a commerically owned facility in Baltimore, Maryland. All of the judiciary's space in this facility is administrative space. In fiscal year 2025, the judiciary's rent for its administrative space in this building totaled about $1.3 million.

**250 West Pratt Street Building, Baltimore, MD**

Source: GAO. | GAO-26-108603

Source: GAO photo. | GAO-26-108603

**Total Usable Square Feet (USF) and Rent Cost for Administrative Space in the 250 West Pratt Street Building, by Court Unit for Fiscal Year 2025 (in thousands)**

| Court unit | Total administrative USF | Total administrative rent cost |
|---|---|---|
| Probation Office | 41.1 | $1,307 |
| **Total** | **41.1** | **$1,307** |

Source: GAO analysis of judiciary data. | GAO-26-108603

Note: The USF reflect the average USF for each court unit in fiscal year 2025. USF include the portion of a building that is available for occupancy, such as offices and team rooms, but might not include building infrastructure spaces and some building common and circulation areas, such as public hallways and toilets.

# Appendix II: Comments from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE
UNITED STATES COURTS

HONORABLE ROBERT J. CONRAD, JR.
Director

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20544

September 10, 2026

Mr. David Marroni
Director, Physical Infrastructure
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G. Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Marroni:

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO) has received the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report *Federal Real Property: The Judiciary Should Measure the Utilization of Its Administrative Space (GAO-26-108603)* and appreciates the opportunity to participate in this important review. The Judiciary understands the importance of effectively and efficiently managing its space portfolio and has been actively exploring opportunities to optimize and realign its space holdings and reduce space-related costs.

In the report, GAO noted the Judiciary's space optimization efforts initiated in August 2025. Thus far, those efforts have already led to the release of 35,262 square feet and have identified 116,835 additional square feet of space that the Judiciary anticipates it can release in the near term. In addition to that space optimization effort, the Judiciary has undertaken a number of initiatives over the years to manage its space portfolio and contain space-related costs. In 2013, the Judicial Conference adopted a national space reduction target and the No Net New (NNN) policy as part of its national space reduction program. The Judiciary achieved its goal of reducing its space portfolio by three percent by fiscal year (FY) 2018, and the NNN policy remains in effect to help ensure continued cost containment, efficient space planning, and restrained growth of the Judiciary's space portfolio. Under the NNN policy, increases in square footage within a circuit generally must be offset by equivalent reductions in square footage within the same fiscal year or deducted from a circuit's space reserve, if available. Since FY 2018, the Judiciary has approved $114.4 million to fund 46 NNN projects, including projects that reduce or reconfigure space to improve efficiency and avoid space expansion. In addition, the Judiciary has continued to reduce its space footprint through the closure of non-resident courthouses where appropriate. In the last six years, six non-resident courthouses have been closed.

A TRADITION OF SERVICE TO THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY

Mr. David Marroni
Page 2

More broadly, the Judiciary continues to evaluate its space needs and the utilization of existing space in light of changing operational requirements and work practices. These efforts include examining opportunities to reduce or consolidate space where appropriate and to make more efficient use of existing facilities. The AO appreciates GAO's work in examining the Judiciary's administrative space and the issues affecting the efficient use and management of that space. The AO will carefully consider the report's findings and recommendation and will coordinate with the Judicial Conference of the United States, as appropriate, regarding any matters requiring further consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Conrad, Jr.

Robert J. Conrad, Jr.
Director

# Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

## GAO Contact

David Marroni, MarroniD@gao.gov

## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Nancy Lueke (Assistant Director), April Yeaney (Analyst in Charge), Adrienne Fernandes Alcantara, Peggie Garcia, Geoffrey Hamilton, Gina Hoover, Crystal Huggins, Delwen Jones, Terence Lam, Maria Mercado, Emilee Pugh Bell, Stephanie Purcell, Katherine Raymond, and Emmanuel Sanchez made key contributions to this report.

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